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SUBJECT: URUGUAYAN ELECTIONS: MUJICA ON TOP WITH TOUGH RUNOFF
ON HORIZON

SUMMARY

1. (U) Jose Mujica of the ruling Frente Amplio coalition (FA) and Luis Alberto Lacalle of the National Party (Blancos) will face off for the presidency in a November 29 runoff, after neither candidate was able to capture 50 percent of the vote in national elections October 25. With 98.5 percent of the votes counted, Mujica claimed 47.5 percent of the vote, while Lacalle finished in second with between 28.5 percent. Colorado Party candidate Pedro Bordaberry surprised many by gaining 16.6 percent of the vote, significantly boosting that party's representation in Parliament. With the final counts still pending the day after the vote, it appears that the FA will fall just short of a parliamentary majority. Mujica is in a strong position to win in November, but National Party supporters are encouraged by the results, as projections show they will be supported by most Colorado voters, which could put them back in the game. END SUMMARY.

MUJICA LEADS, LACALLE IN SECOND

2. (U) Former Tupamaro guerrilla Jose Mujica and the Frente Amplio coalition claimed between 47.5 percent of the vote in Sunday's elections, with former President Luis Alberto Lacalle's National Party finishing in second with 28.5 percent. As neither candidate was able to surpass the threshold of 50 percent of the electorate plus one vote, a runoff will be held between Mujica and Lacalle on November 29.

3. (U) The Colorado Party is considered the big winner, pulling in nearly 16.6 percent or more than 60 percent gain over the 2004 elections, which demonstrates the party's remarkable renewal under new leader Pedro Bordaberry. Bordaberry's celebratory speech included a declaration of his intent to vote for Lacalle in the runoff based on his belief that this decision would be the best for Uruguay. Colorado voters were already expected to vote for Lacalle in November, but this announcement is a sign that Bordaberry will do his utmost to help Lacalle win.

4. (U) The Independent Party made a positive showing with 2.4 percent, but failed to receive enough votes to have representation in the Senate. Despite this blow, Independent Party voters will play a key role in determining the next president, since, based on current levels of support, the FA only needs another 2.5 percent of the vote to win in November.

5. (U) The FA support roughly met the expectations of most pollsters, who had reported a 44-45 percent intention to vote and had predicted the Frente would get a few more points from the undecideds. Analysts also predicted the National Party would receive about 30 percent. As anticipated, the FA won by a substantial margin in Montevideo and the neighboring department of Canelones. The FA gained the highest number of

votes in most of the departments bordering Argentina, including Blanco vice presidential candidate Jorge Larrañaga's home turf, Paysandu. The Colorado showing in the interior was significant, however, with the party pulling in 20-30 percent in some departments. Because of this, Lacalle will go into the runoff with an advantage in the interior.

¶6. (U) Following the release of the unofficial results, supporters of the major parties convened in three different areas of Montevideo. Mujica spoke to a crowd of thousands of FA supporters gathered outside the NH Columbia hotel in a carnival-like atmosphere, clogging the main road along the Río de la Plata. Despite their strong showing, Mujica and running-mate Astori didn't wear winners' grins during their addresses to the thousands of FA supporters in the streets; they were unable to hide their disappointment with the failure to win in the first round and the possible loss of the parliamentary majority.

¶7. (U) Lacalle later addressed a smaller group of National Party members occupying a corner of a plaza in the historical center of Montevideo. The Colorado Party celebrated in its traditional headquarters - an antique building which, filled with young party faithful, mirrored the Colorado Party's current image of an old party buoyed by new ideas.

PARLIAMENT EVENLY SPLIT

¶8. (U) The makeup of the Parliament is still unknown, but the FA appears to be on the brink of losing the absolute majority it has enjoyed for the past five years. Currently, the FA is projected to win 15 out of 30 seats in the Senate and 49 out

of 99 seats in the Congress of Deputies. The National Party will have 9-10 Senate seats and 29-30 spots in Congress while the Colorado Party claimed 5-6 seats in the Senate and approximately 18 seats in the lower house. Both Mujica and Lacalle have pledged to reach across the aisle, and coalitions will likely begin to form in the weeks to come.

BOTH REFERENDA FAIL

¶9. (U) Voters also rejected a controversial referendum annulling a law known as the Ley de Caducidad (the Expiry Law), which guaranteed amnesty for those accused of human rights abuses during the dictatorship. A second referendum allowing the Uruguayan diaspora to vote from outside the country also failed, receiving only 38 percent support. This was an unexpected outcome, as pollsters projected a much closer result with polls indicating 48 percent support. The failure of the referendum served as a disappointment to many Frente Amplio supporters who had supported the measures. In reference to the absentee voting referendum, Mujica lamented that voters didn't want to allow their compatriots living outside the country equal opportunity to vote, but noted that the government would always respect the will of the people.

ATMOSPHERICS

¶10. (U) The elections proceeded smoothly, with an estimated 90 percent turnout and almost no complaints about irregularities. Frente Amplio activists enthusiastically dominated the streets of Montevideo.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) Interestingly, although Mujica's vote count should put him in a strong position to triumph in November, most Uruguayans view the result as a slowing of his (and his party's) momentum. The unpleasant reality is that Mujica did worse than Vazquez five years before, despite the Frente's successful first term in office. The National Party is hoping

that, with Bordaberry's help in a head-to-head contest, Lacalle will convince the electorate that he is best suited to govern and to represent Uruguay abroad. At this point, we expect it to be a tough fight. End Comment.

MATTHEWMAN